

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FINAL

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED
DATE ENTERED

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Central Library - Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library

AND/OR COMMON

Marion County Public Library

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

40 East St. Clair Street

CITY, TOWN

Indianapolis

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

STATE

Indiana

VICINITY OF

CODE

18

11th

COUNTY

Marion

CODE

097

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

**CATEGORY**

- DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- STRUCTURE
- SITE
- OBJECT

**OWNERSHIP**

- PUBLIC
- PRIVATE
- BOTH
- PUBLIC ACQUISITION**
- IN PROCESS
- BEING CONSIDERED

**STATUS**

- OCCUPIED
- UNOCCUPIED
- WORK IN PROGRESS
- ACCESSIBLE**
- YES: RESTRICTED
- YES: UNRESTRICTED
- NO

**PRESENT USE**

- AGRICULTURE
- MUSEUM
- COMMERCIAL
- PARK
- EDUCATIONAL
- PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- ENTERTAINMENT
- RELIGIOUS
- GOVERNMENT
- SCIENTIFIC
- INDUSTRIAL
- TRANSPORTATION
- MILITARY
- OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library Board of Trustees

STREET & NUMBER

40 East St. Clair Street

CITY, TOWN

Indianapolis

VICINITY OF

STATE

Indiana

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Office of the Recorder of Marion County

STREET & NUMBER

City-County Building, East Washington Street

CITY, TOWN

Indianapolis

STATE

Indiana

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

DATE

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

CITY, TOWN

## 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

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### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The building, inspired by the classic Greek Doric architectural design, has three stories and a basement. The two wings, containing the East and West Reading Rooms, and the Main Reading Room, and the stack rooms, form four sides of a large court and air well, traversed by a bridge for direct access. The exterior of the building is of Bedford limestone, having a base of Vermont granite and concrete roofs and floors. The interior finish in wood is Indiana quarter sawed white oak and much of the carving, in wood, stone, and ornamental plaster was done on the site. None of the service rooms lie below ground level. The varying floor levels are an interesting feature of the construction, relieved by unusual inclines, passageways and short flights of steps. The stone entrance foyer leads on the east to the Auditorium and Children's Room, and on the west to the administrative offices. In front, the entrance foyer opens into the Main Reading Room, a great open shelf room one hundred feet long and fifty-five feet wide, occupying the entire front wing, with walls of limestone and caen stone. An important feature of this room is an unusual ceiling forty-three feet above the marble and tile floor, highly detailed and in the deep relief simulating a heavy structure. The material is plaster pre-cast into intricate classical decorative details. Inset into the beam framed ceiling spaces are oil painted canvases, decorative rosetts, and painted frescoes. The East and West wings are two-story structures at the top of marble stairs at each end of the Main Reading Room. They each have a length of one hundred and forty feet and are panelled in oak above the book cases up to the ceiling coves. The original lighting for the entire building was indirect. Heat was supplied by a combination of both direct and indirect systems of hot water and hot air. The lighting system was first supplemented in 1951 through the introduction of 500 watt recessed incandescent ceiling fixtures. These were further supplemented in 1961 with the installation of flood lights in the chandeliers in all spaces, except the mezzanine which received ceiling-hung fluorescent fixtures. A new thermal system was added in 1971 with the inclusion of air conditioning.

No changes have been made in the basic architectural configuration of the building from the original 1913-16 design. The reading rooms, offices, and work areas are basically as they were at that time. Minor modifications have included the relocation of a rest room to a former office area, the installation of a storage and display area in the east hallway, the cutting of a door through the decorative plaster of the west balcony directly into the stack area, the remodeling of the auditorium, and the insertion of a floor above the full length of the high east hallway to provide additional space. In 1963, an addition, consisting of a basement and first floor, was added to the north-east side of the building. The connection to the main building was made through what had been a rest room area. In 1974, four additional floors were added to this addition with connections into the main building through the north end of the east balcony and the fourth floor stack area. The 1974 addition necessitated the blocking-up of the north window of the East Reading Room.

## 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES    1913-1916

BUILDER/ARCHITECT    Paul Cret

### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Indianapolis Central Library is a classic work of superior distinction. Constructed in the period of 1913-1916 by the firm of Zantzinger, Borie, and Medary, and designed by the eminent architect, Paul Cret, who also designed the Pan American Union Building in Washington, D.C., the building exemplifies a sensitive use of the classical and classically inspired elements. It remains to this date a most significant example of historic architecture. The South Facade, encompassing the main entrance to the building, is one of the finest imaginative modern interpretations of the Greek Doric style to have been created in the early twentieth century. The exterior use of stone is finely proportioned and detailed. Ralph Adams Cram, in the September 1918, Architectural Forum, commented that the Indianapolis Central Library "is the best example of classic architecture in America...The whole thing is not only Greek in form but penetratingly Greek in spirit...the most notable qualities in the exterior are scale and surface. It is not a large building, yet the scale is so delicately preserved that one does not think of dimension...Nothing is overdone or wasted, and the enormous success of the result follows from proportions that are fine and sensitive to the point of perfection... one of the most distinctive and admirable contributions to architecture that have been made in America".

## 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

LaFollette, Suzanne, Art in America, p. 276 Harper & Brothers, NY, 1929  
 Hoak, E.W., Masterpieces of Architecture in the United States, Scribner's Sons, NY, 1930  
 Wiggam, Albert E., The Fruit of the Family Tree, p. 274, Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1924  
Architectural Forum, September, 1918, pp. 67-68 Leslie's Weekly, April 20, 1918, p. 539  
Christian Science Monitor, June 13, 1923, p. 14  
Indianapolis Star, May 21, 1939, part 6, p. 8

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY Approximately 1

UTM REFERENCES

A	1 6	5 7 2 2 1 5	4 4 0 3 2 9 0	B				
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING	
C				D				

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Lawrence Downey, Associate Director

ORGANIZATION

Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library

DATE

7/16/75

STREET & NUMBER

40 E. St. Clair Street

TELEPHONE

CITY OR TOWN

Indianapolis

STATE

Indiana

## 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
 ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER